

**Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis  
Committee on Government Reform  
Hearing on “Emerging from Isabel:  
A Review of FEMA’s Preparation for and Response to Affected Areas  
in the Hampton Roads Region”  
October 10, 2003  
1:30 pm  
Chesapeake City Council  
Chesapeake, Virginia**

We are conducting this field hearing in Chesapeake today to assess the post-Hurricane Isabel damage and the state of emergency preparedness in the Hampton Roads region. My colleague and good friend, Congressman Randy Forbes, requested that this Congressional committee actually come down here to witness first-hand the adequacy of the federal, state and local governments’ response to the devastation inflicted by one of the worst storms in history to hit this region, and to evaluate the state of cooperation among the government agencies responsible for emergency preparedness. These are vital areas of concern to the Government Reform Committee, and indeed to the entire nation, in the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world. It is for these reasons that we decided to come to Chesapeake this afternoon and hold this important hearing.

I am pleased that Congressman Forbes and Congressman Bobby Scott are with us this morning, and I would like to welcome them both to this field hearing.

I don’t need to remind anyone here that Hurricane Isabel inflicted death, injury and severe economic damage on this entire region. It has been over three weeks since Isabel roared through the region and the effects of this horrific storm are still disrupting people’s lives today. For example, one of the most glaring adverse impacts on virtually everyone living or doing business in this area is the flooding and closure of the Midtown Tunnel.

The Government Reform Committee has a vital interest in the government’s response to the damage caused by Hurricane Isabel to the Hampton Roads region. It is critical that the federal, state and local governments act in a coordinated, efficient manner, not only in response to future natural disasters, but also to potential terrorist acts. The federal government, the Commonwealth of Virginia and local jurisdictions have taken a number of actions to improve coordination of emergency preparedness efforts. Since the private sector owns most of the critical infrastructure in the Hampton Roads region and across the country, it is important for the private and public sector to work closely to protect the region’s infrastructure.

Hurricane Isabel and the coordinated response to it mark an important opportunity to reassess this region’s readiness and assure that plans are workable and will meet the needs of all those involved. I hope that this hearing will give us an accurate picture of the clean-up efforts in the Chesapeake area, what was learned from the devastation of

Hurricane Isabel, and the progress made in developing an effective emergency preparedness program. Also, the Committee hopes to find out what actions have been taken by the federal government and local jurisdictions to improve coordination of emergency preparedness efforts. We will also find out what, if anything, has been learned concerning the critical infrastructure the private sector owns and what can be done to keep it on-line during a disaster.

We have assembled an impressive group of witnesses for this afternoon's hearing. We will hear from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Virginia Department of Public Safety, and from Dinwiddie and Isle of Wight Counties, and the Cities of Suffolk and Chesapeake.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the Committee, and I look forward to their testimony.